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Title Slide: Introduction to SSOCS Data

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Welcome to the training modules for the School Survey on Crime and Safety, also known as SSOCS, which is spelled S-S-O-C-S. Those interested in using data from the SSOCS should view each module in the training series prior to conducting any analyses. This training series allows you to access the modules in any order. However, the most effective way to proceed is to view the modules in the order presented, as some information in later modules builds on earlier modules.

In this module, you will learn about the information available from the School Survey on Crime and Safety. This includes an introduction to the study's target population, the sample and study design, and the methods and years of data collection. The module also includes a broad overview of the topics for which data are collected and available for analysis.

For a general orientation to the dataset training system and a description of the functionality and navigation of the Distance Learning Dataset Training, or DLDT, you may click the 'Help' button at the bottom of your screen, or refer to the module titled "Introduction to the NCES Distance Learning Dataset Training System," which can be accessed from the landing page.

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A safe school environment is necessary for educating our nation's youth. Students who engage in criminal behavior at school or who are victims of crime at school may not succeed in school or achieve to their highest potential. School crime is a major concern for students, educators, parents, and the community, as well as for researchers and policymakers.

SSOCS is a cross-sectional survey that collects extensive school crime and safety data from public schools in the United States. The person completing each survey is either the principal or the person identified as most knowledgeable about crime and safety in their schools. Throughout this series of instructional modules, we will be referring to the survey respondents simply as "respondents" or "school administrators." Data from this collection can be used to study the relationship between school characteristics and violent and non-violent crimes in American schools and examine what programs, practices, and policies schools use in their efforts to prevent crime.

SSOCS is a cross-sectional survey – that is, each time the survey is administered, a new sample is selected, and schools are not tracked year to year. The survey form is mailed to the selected schools during the spring semester of the school year. In the latest survey year, 2009-2010, 3,476 primary, middle, high, and combined public schools received the survey. A total of 2,648 public schools completed the questionnaires, for a weighted response rate of 80.8 percent.

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SSOCS is a collaborative effort among:

- the National Center for Education Statistics at the U.S. Department of Education,
- the Office of Safe and Healthy Students (formerly the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools) of the U.S. Department of Education,
- the Bureau of Justice Statistics at the U.S. Department of Justice, and
- the Census Bureau at the U.S. Department of Commerce.

The National Center for Education Statistics, or NCES, manages the survey and publishes the tables and reports generated from the results; the Office of Safe and Healthy Students financed the data collection through 2010; the Bureau of Justice Statistics, or BJS, collaborates on the survey development; and the Census Bureau administers and oversees the data collection for the survey.

SSOCS has been conducted five times: in school years 1999–2000, 2003–2004, 2005–2006, 2007–2008, and 2009–2010. The survey has undergone several changes since it was first administered in the 1999-2000 school year. In 2004, the survey was updated to improve content, flow, and clarity. Since then, the overall survey includes only minor changes. While the topics covered by the SSOCS questionnaire remain essentially unchanged, some individual questions have been altered.

Throughout this training program, differences between years of data collection will be briefly discussed; however, examples and descriptions will primarily reflect the most recent year of SSOCS data collection, 2009-2010. Because SSOCS has been repeated, it can be used to track national trends. To date, SSOCS is the only periodic survey that collects detailed national information on crime and safety from the perspective of school administrators.

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SSOCS is an institutional survey – that is, the unit of analysis is the school, not the teachers, students, or staff. The list of schools eligible for sampling – also called the sampling frame – is constructed from the Common Core of Data (CCD) Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe data file. The CCD is an annual NCES collection of data on all public schools, public school districts, and state education agencies in the United States. To learn more about the CCD, click on the corresponding underlined screen text.

Although the sampling frame is based on the CCD Public Elementary and Secondary School Universe file, certain types of schools in the file are excluded from the SSOCS sample population. Excluded from the sampling frame are those schools located outside of the 50 states and the District of Columbia, Bureau of Indian Education schools, special education schools, vocational schools, alternative schools, ungraded schools, and schools that do not include students beyond kindergarten. These limits to the

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sample population should be kept in mind when making inferences about the SSOCS data.

Regular public schools, public charter schools, and public schools that have partial or total magnet programs are included in the frame.

Once a school is selected to participate in SSOCS, NCES takes steps to ensure that the response rate is high to maintain the representative sample. This includes getting and sharing endorsements for the survey, contacting the school district for permission to survey selected schools, sending a letter to principals with information about the data collection effort, and conducting telephone follow-up with nonresponding schools.

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In total, SSOCS asks about nine interrelated topics on school safety and crime. Each topic is described briefly in this module.

The first section of the SSOCS instrument, “School Practices and Programs,” addresses current school practices and programs that relate to crime and discipline, such as security procedures and violence reduction programs.

The second section, “Parent and Community Involvement at School,” collects information about efforts to involve parents in maintaining school discipline and in responding to students’ problem behaviors.

The third section, “School Security Staff,” asks respondents about the presence of security guards, security personnel, School Resource Officers, and other sworn law enforcement officers in the schools.

The fourth section, “Staff Training,” asks respondents about training related to safety and discipline provided by the school or school district for classroom teachers or aides.

In the fifth section, “Limitations on Crime Prevention,” respondents specify whether efforts to reduce or prevent crime are constrained by any factors related to teachers, parents, students, or administrative policies.

The sixth section, “Frequency of Crime and Violence at School,” focuses on the incidence of homicides and shootings that occur at school.

“Number of Incidents,” found in the seventh section, asks for incident counts for a range of recorded offenses at school.

The eighth section, “Disciplinary Problems and Actions,” asks about the degree to which schools face disciplinary problems and their response to some specified problems.

In the ninth and final section, “School Characteristics,” respondents provide information about the characteristics of the school and the student body.

Questionnaires and brochures from each SSOCS administration are provided on the SSOCS homepage, which can be accessed by clicking on the underlined screen text, 'homepage.'

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SSOCS data can be used to investigate measures of safety in and around American schools. These measures include the frequency and types of crimes occurring in schools, on school grounds, at school related events, and going to and from school; disciplinary actions allowed in schools and how often they are applied; what policies and practices schools develop and use to prevent or reduce crime; and various characteristics of school climate related to school safety.

Because the SSOCS survey respondents are representative of public primary, middle, high, and combined level schools in the United States, the data can be used to make inferences about crime and safety for this population. To use SSOCS data to draw conclusions about U.S. public schools, it is necessary to properly apply the weight variables included within the data file. Researchers should keep in mind the population limitations described earlier when making inferences about the entire school universe.

Estimates can also be made for different subgroups within the universe of U.S. public schools. Valid subgroups for analysis are represented by the sample frame variables used to select the survey sample. The sample design for the SSOCS ensures adequate representation in these subgroup categories. These categories include school level, locale, and enrollment size. School level indicates whether the school enrolls students in primary, middle or high school grades, or some combination. Locale is based on the Census defined geographic region in which the school is located, and includes categories such as city, suburb, town and rural. Enrollment size is categorized into four ranges based on the number of students attending. More information on sample frame variables can be found in the user's manual and codebook for each year of the survey.

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Users should keep in mind that conclusions about causality between school characteristics and crime cannot be made due to the cross-sectional, non-experimental nature of the SSOCS data. Correlations between these characteristics and the crime and safety practices reported can assist in developing targeted efforts to address the specific needs of schools.

SSOCS can also be used to identify and track trends in crime and crime prevention measures in public schools. Users should keep in mind that SSOCS is a cross-sectional survey, so differences from year to year for specific schools are not tracked using this survey. Only overall changes in national trends for the information collected can be evaluated. Users also should be aware that there have been minor changes to the survey since it was first administered in school year 1999-2000. Before using the SSOCS data to examine trends over time, researchers should refer to the user

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documentation from each administration for question changes that may affect comparisons.

NCES and the Bureau of Justice Statistics provide SSOCS reports and tables that address the need for consistent and reliable estimates about school-based crime and crime prevention to the U.S. Department of Education, the Congress, the states, other education policy makers, practitioners and the public. Users will find some of the information they seek in these published reports and tables, which can be accessed by clicking on the corresponding underlined screen text.

NCES also makes the data collected by SSOCS available for researchers who wish to examine the data in more detail or run additional analyses.

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This module has provided you with an introduction to SSOCS and described the study's target population, the sample and study design, and the methods and years of data collection. Additionally, this module has highlighted topics for which data are available for analyses. Important resources that have been provided throughout the module are summarized in this slide along with the module's objectives for your reference.

The subsequent SSOCS training modules contained within this system discuss some of these topics in greater detail and address questions about how to access the SSOCS data files and effectively use the data for your analytic purposes.

You may now proceed to the next module in the series, or click the exit button to return to the landing page.